

## **Huntington River Water Quality Study – 2015**

### **Summary of Findings**

The summer of 2015 marked the eleventh year of Huntington River Conservation Partnership (HRCP) water quality monitoring, and the 15<sup>th</sup> year on the Huntington portion of the river. With laboratory support from a Vermont Dept. of Environmental Conservation Larosa Grant, a large number of volunteers from Huntington and Richmond sampled specified locations along the length of the Huntington River on a weekly basis for bacterial contamination by *E. coli*. Total Phosphorus levels were measured for the first time.

- There were relatively few cases where *E. coli* contamination exceeded the Federal and now also the State Standard, though values frequently were above the old State Standard. In no cases did overall Geomean (site or date) exceed Standard. One explanation based on prior studies for the relatively few values above current Standard is that weather was quiet with little rainfall in the period just before sampling, the higher values where rainfall occurred.
- The patterns across sites on a given date in several cases were characterized by isolated peaks that might suggest a spot source immediately up stream or at the sites. At the same time, the site location of these peaks when observed was not consistent from week to week.
- Though there were several cases where contamination increased moving down river, that was not invariably the case. The overall Geomean by site rose moving down river, but again in no consistent pattern.
- The pattern of peaks and valleys generally was similar in single date comparisons between sites, as found frequently in past years, suggesting that some general contributor such as runoff was affecting multiple sites.
- There was a modest correlation between rainfall over the 24 hours prior to sampling and overall Geomean for the day, much weaker with pooled results across all years. Correlations between river level and contamination were very weak.
- The correlations between rate of change in water level were weak when water level was compared with overall river Geomean or with Horseshoe *E. coli* contamination. Strong correlations might be difficult to observe due to the several cases where the amount by which water level changed in advance of samplings was small.
- Results from monthly, rotating sampling generally reflected results from the weekly measurements. Noteworthy, however, were certain unusually high values for Hollow Brook for the second year running.
- Total Phosphorus (TP) measurements were undertaken for the first time in 2015 at the request of a Huntington Conservation Commission member. Slightly higher values for the first week were followed by more-or-less even values for the duration of the study. Mean values (7.9 ppb) were well below the standard for Class B, Medium, High-Gradient streams established by Vt. Agency of Natural Resources of 15 ppb.

## **Overall Results**

What follows is a summary of the results from the 2015 Huntington River Water Quality study. The reader is encouraged to review the 2006 and 2007 Reports for discussion of definitions, methods, Federal and State Standards and other background material. Past Reports can be found at: [www.huntingtonriver.org](http://www.huntingtonriver.org). *E. coli* (of any species) is considered a sentinel for fecal contamination, indicating the possible presence of human pathogens. The identification of pathogenic *E. coli* species has not been attempted.

**Figure-1** shows the sampling locations for the main study sites. Funding constraints meant that the weekly sampling sites along the River were reduced to twelve, and the sites along the Winooski River dropped. Monthly samples continued to be taken. As for 2014, samples were taken over ten weeks as compared to 13 weeks for previous studies of the Huntington plus Richmond watershed.

**Table 1** presents the complete 2015 data set. Data entries are color-coded indicating values exceeding the Federal Standard (pink: 235, measured as *E. coli* / 100 ml). Beginning in 2012, the State standard was adjusted upwards from 77, to the Federal Standard of 235. Values above 77 are colored in yellow to allow comparisons with years past when that was the State Standard.

Similar to 2014, relatively few samples were above Federal Standards, mostly clustered at two dates (see **Tables 2 and 3** for yearly comparisons). One likely cause based on results from past years was significant rainfall the 12-24 hr before samples were taken (6/23, 7/28, 8/4; see below, **Figure 5.1**). The number of samples above the old State Standard (pink plus yellow) was somewhat lower than the average since the study began, bearing in mind there were fewer sampling sites. In no case was the Geomean for a given date above the Federal / current State Standard, though the old State Standard was exceeded seven times. The overall Geomean for each weekly site never exceeded the Federal / new State Standard, though the value for the old State Standard was exceeded at nine of the twelve sites.

Samples taken on a monthly, rotating basis showed a similar pattern (**Table 1**). Noteworthy were high values on two occasions for Hollow Brook for which high values have been observed before (**Table 2**). One of the high values for Hollow Brook occurred in isolation from values for all of the other sites for that date (8/25) also true on one occasion in 2014 (see 2104 Report). Such a result might be attributable to a point source of contamination.

## **Quality Assurance**

During the 2015 sampling season, 135 regular *E.coli* samples were submitted. Eleven additional samples (8.1%) were taken as quality assurance field duplicates (**Table 4**). The VTDEC Laboratory quality assurance objectives for *E. coli* on Quanti-tray are the following: <25 colonies, 125% relative percent difference (%RPD); >25 colonies, 50% RPD. Overall, the mean %RPD was 35.6%. This is within VTDEC objectives for QA duplicates, though four individual duplicate comparisons exceeded the QA objectives.

**Figures 2 and 3** look at sample location by date. Geomean values by-in-large were below the Standard (enlarged red symbols for those above Standard; **Figure 3**).

The patterns for a given date, though varied, in several cases were characterized by isolated peaks that might suggest a spot source immediately up stream or at the sites. Note, however, that the site location of these peaks when they were observed was not consistent from week to week. Such spikes have been observed in the past and illustrate how dilution, bactericidal activity and / or other, unknown factors cause significant reductions in contamination further down river. The short life-span of viable *E. coli* once it leaves the animal digestive tract is well-known. Though weekly values tended to rise as one moved downstream, that was not invariably the case. The overall Geomean by site rose as one moved down river **Figure 4.1**. At the same time it is difficult to recognize a specific pattern when previous results are compiled (**Figure 4.2**).

**Figure 5** examines each dates at individual sites. Again, larger, red triangles indicate values above Standard. Generally speaking, the pattern of peaks and valleys was similar in between-site comparisons. This suggests that some general contributor such as runoff was affecting each site.

Past results have suggested that high levels of contamination follow heavy rains, interpreted to indicate contamination from land runoff. This was based on significant rain in the 12-24 hour period before sampling and the co-occurrence of high levels of contamination at multiple sites along the river. As shown in **Figure 6.1**, there was a modest correlation between 24 hour rainfall and overall Geomean for the day in 2015 ( $r^2=0.69$ ) indicating 69% of the variability in the Geomean values can be attributed to rainfall occurring the 24 hour before sampling. Pooled data across all years point to a weaker correlation (**Figure 6.1**;  $r^2 = 0.24$ ). As before, interpretation is confounded by the number of observations where there was no rainfall.

The relationship between river and contamination showed no correlation between river level and contamination both measured at the popular Horseshoe Bend swimming hole just below Huntington Lower Village against overall River Geomean (**Figure 6.2**). The correlation was better but remained weak when the comparison was between river depth and paired *E. coli* measurements at Horseshoe.

Half hourly measurement of water level were made for the third year running, made possible by a donation of continuous data-logging equipment by the US EPA in 2012. **Figure 6.3** shows the pattern of change in river level the 48 hours before sampling (RED triangles indicate 12 and 24 hr prior to sampling). Noteworthy was the flatness of the curves for most dates, 7/14, 7/21 and 8/4 somewhat being exceptions.

Despite the general lack of water level change before sampling for most weeks, nonetheless the relationship between 12 hour change in water level change overall River Geomean and also Horseshoe contamination, where water level was measured was examined (**Figure 6.4.1**). (Red symbols indicate when water level was falling – see **Figure 6.3**). There was not as strong a correlation between rate of change in water level when water level was compared with overall river Geomean ( $r^2 = 0.58$ ) and a much poorer correlation with Horseshoe *E. coli* contamination ( $r^2 = 0.20$ ). The stronger correlations observed previously for 2014 may not be reliable as they were driven primarily by a single value (see 2014 Report). The 2015 correlations at 24 and 48 hours were even poorer (not shown). A factor to bear in mind when interpreting the 2015 data is that the amount by which water level changed was small for many of the weekly values.

**Figure 6.4.2** shows compiled data from the three past years during which half-hour water levels were measured. The highest correlation was for the 12 hour water level change ( $r^2 = 0.73$  vs overall river Geomean;  $r^2 = 0.83$  vs Horseshoe contamination) again however dependent on a

limited number of high values. The correlations were unimpressive at 24 and 48 hours (not shown). Though it is true that levels were falling the majority of the time, there was no obvious difference between the impact of rising vs falling levels. Presumably a recent runoff event is signified in both cases.

### **Box Plots - variability**

Geomeans again were computed for data analysis, because of the wide range of values and the fact the data are not normally distributed (see 2006 Report for further explanation). The spread of values is illustrated by the use of “box plots” (**Figure 7**). Box plots are often used to assess the variability in the data (see 2007 Report for details). The intent is to compare values for a specific site and not to make comparisons between sites. Hence the vertical axis scale is not the same for each site: using the same scale makes it difficult to observe the data distribution in certain cases. All but one site (Spence) had an outlier. Introducing the caution of data interpretation from a statistical point of view. Past yearly results have been characterized in general by a number of sites with outliers.

### **Winooski River**

Studies of the Winooski River were not undertaken in 2015 due to budgetary constraints.

### **Total Phosphorus**

Total Phosphorus measurements were undertaken for the first time in 2015, with the aim at assessing the magnitude of any TP runoff problem. As shown in **Figure 8**. Values were higher for all sites the first week (6/23) otherwise being more-or-less even for the other sample weeks. Given two sample weeks when there appeared to be an upward trend as one moved down river, weekly values otherwise were flat. In 2014, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources established a standard of 15 ppb ( $\mu\text{g/L}$ ) for TP (at low median monthly flow) in Class B Medium, High-Gradient Streams. At only one site on the June 23 sampling date was the 15 ppb standard exceeded, and then only slightly. Throughout the remainder of the season, TP levels remained well within the standard for the Huntington River.

We conclude that Phosphorus nutrient release is not a considerable problem for the Huntington River watershed. Although, a season with differing flow conditions may indicate otherwise. We're currently not planning to continue TP sampling in the 2016 season.

### **Comments**

The recommendation from past results remains in place in terms of avoiding river use after a major rainfall event.

### **Thanks to all the volunteers**

Many thanks to all the volunteers whose efforts made the study possible. It was their effort over the years that caused the Huntington River to be chosen as one of only two study sites in the State to be supported through State and Federal funding. All should be proud of the effort and result.

***Those interested in learning more about the Huntington River project should go to:  
<http://www.huntingtonriver.org>***

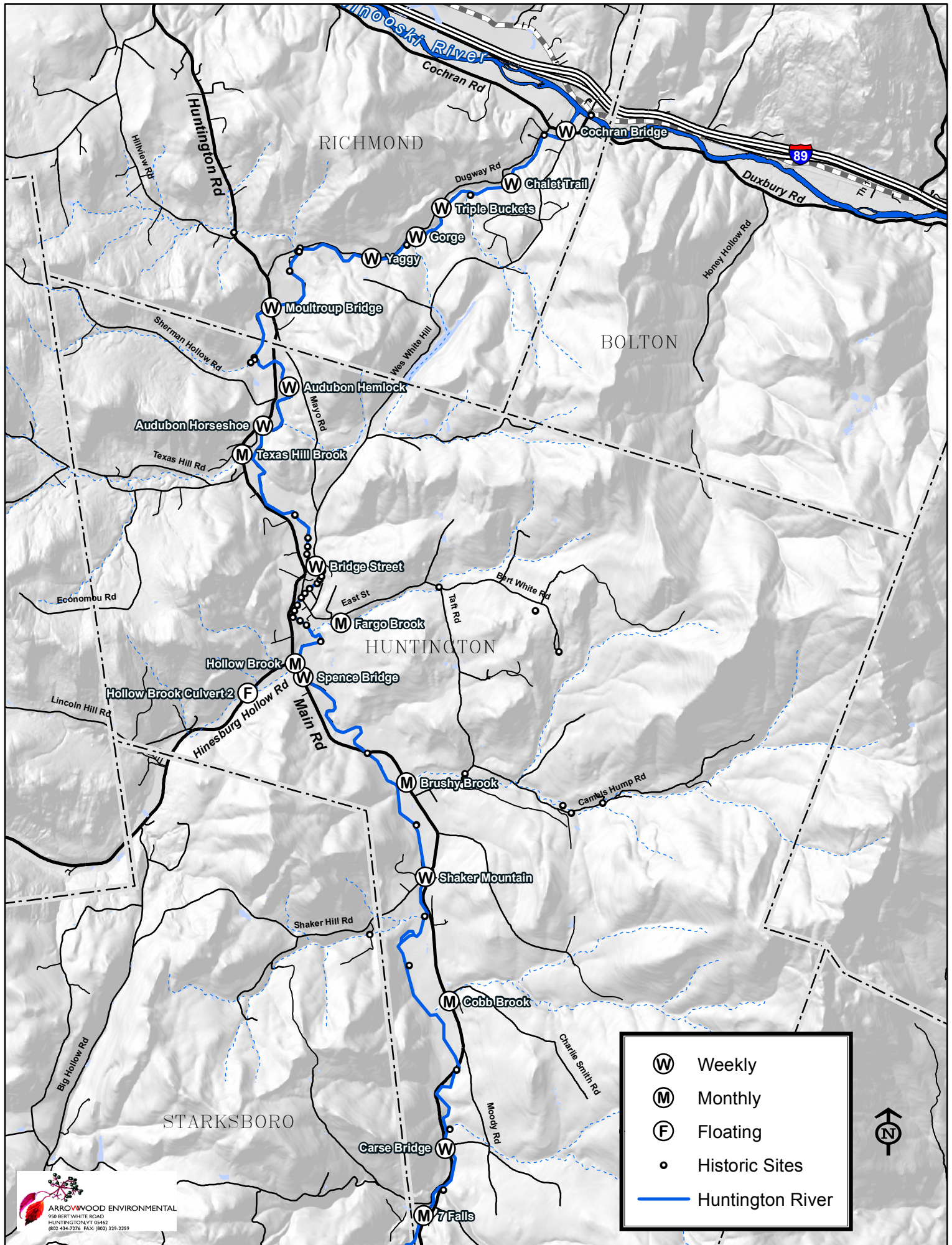
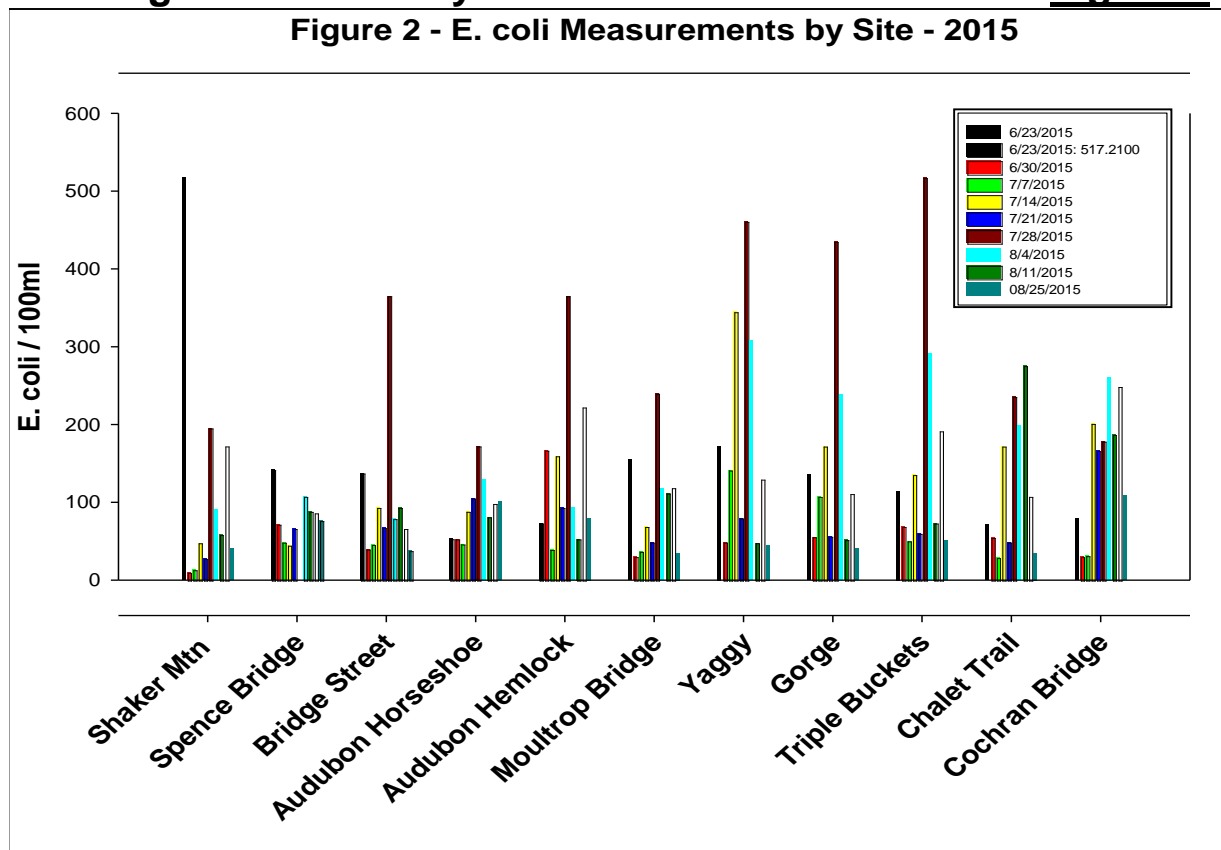


FIGURE 1: Sample Sites

# Huntington River Study - 2015

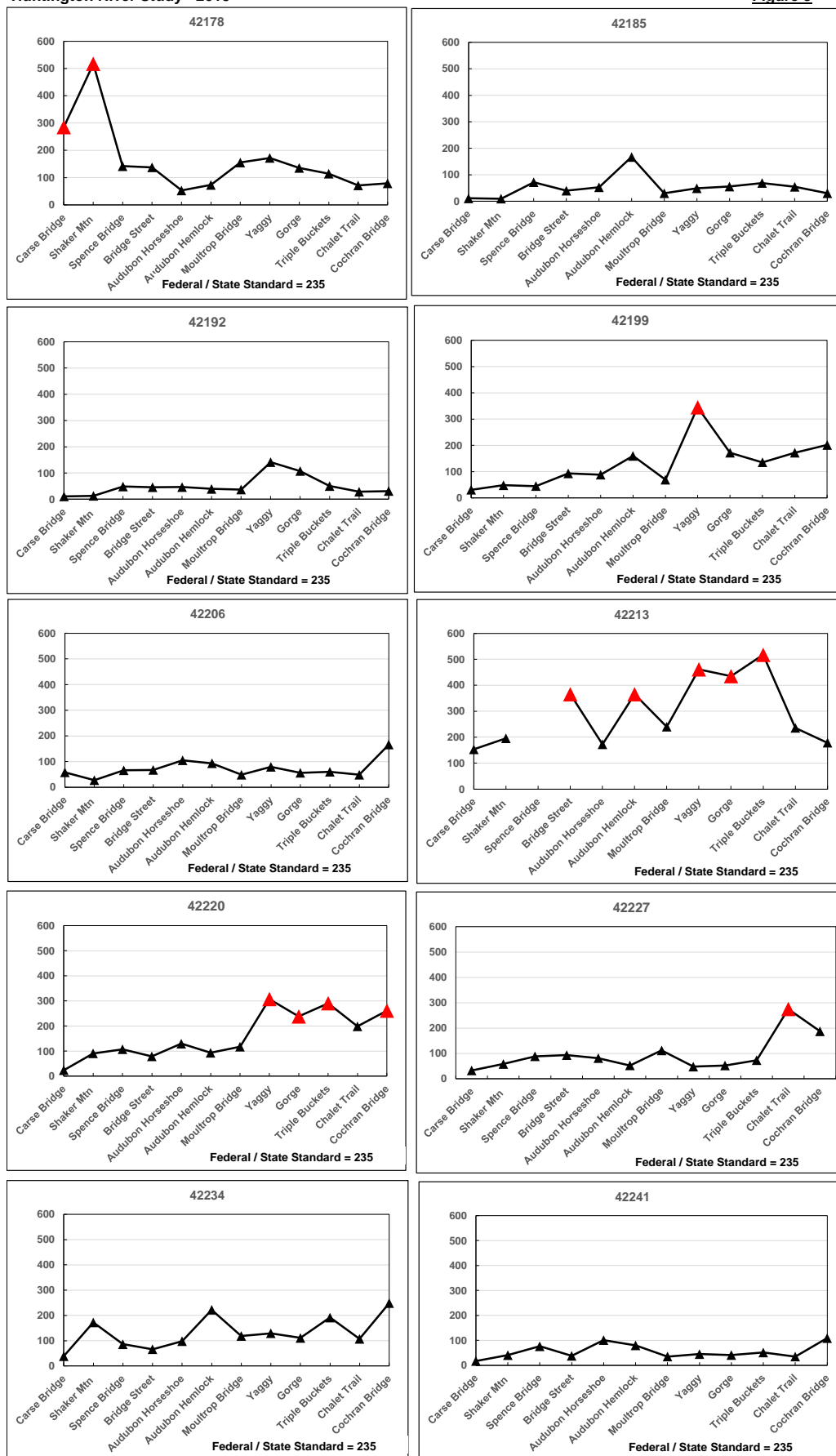
## Figure 2



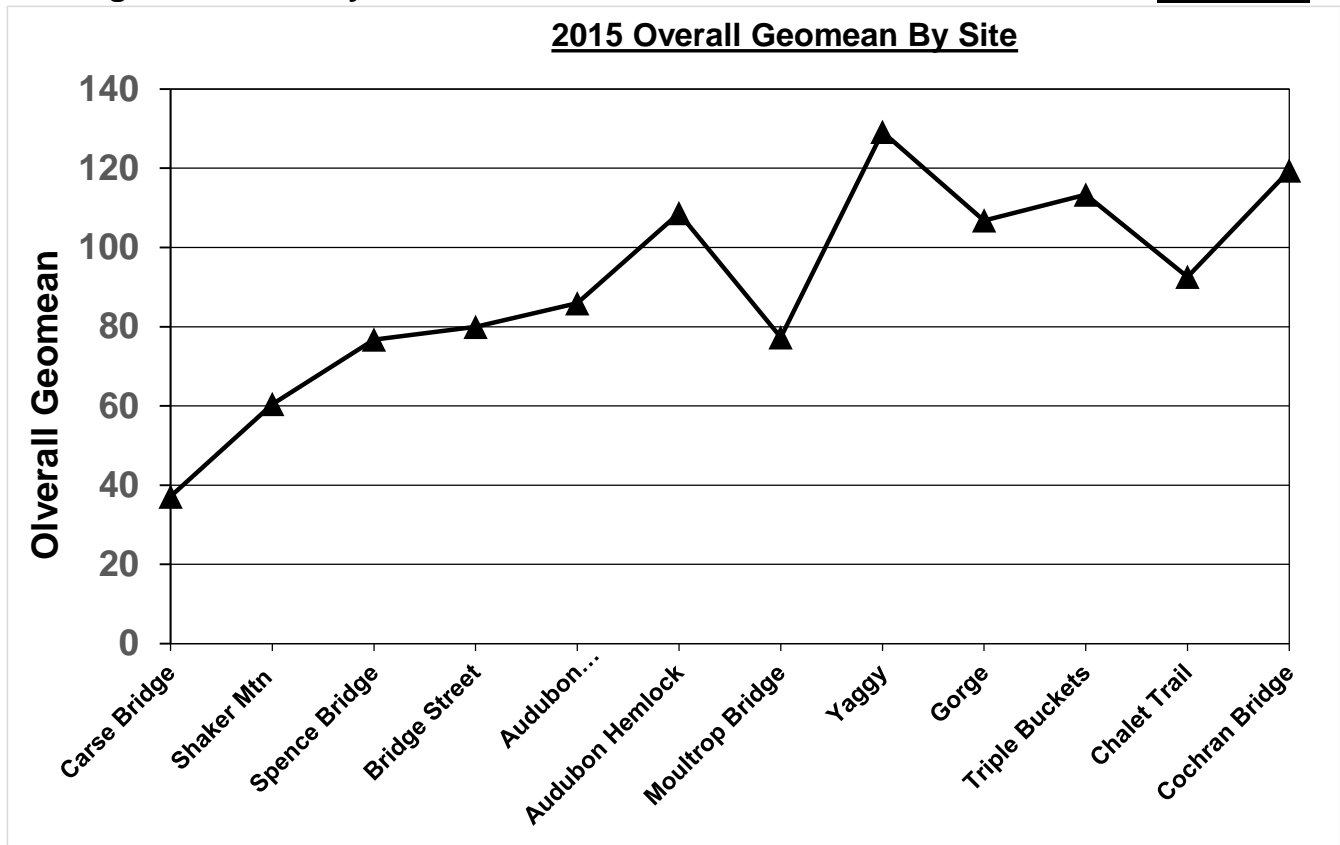


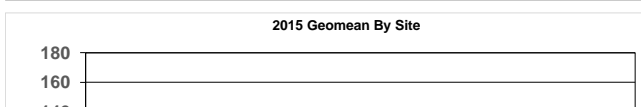
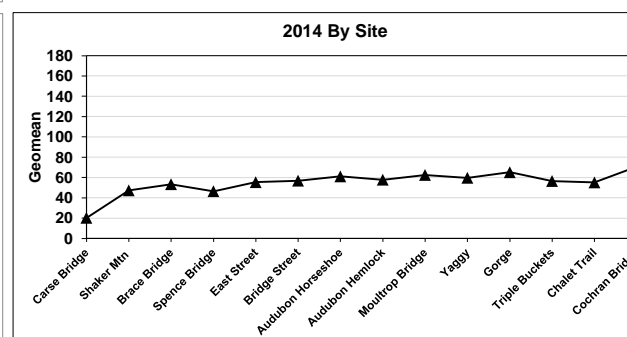
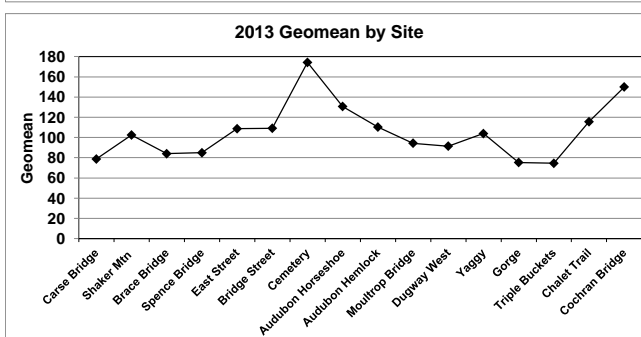
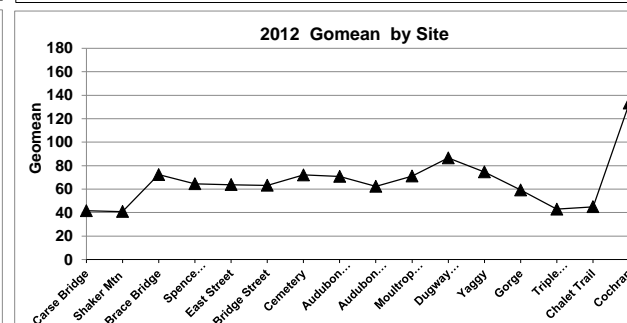
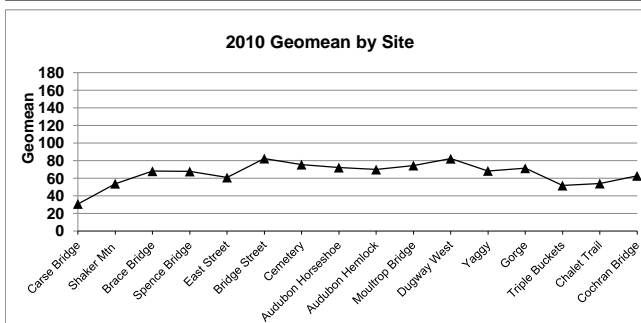
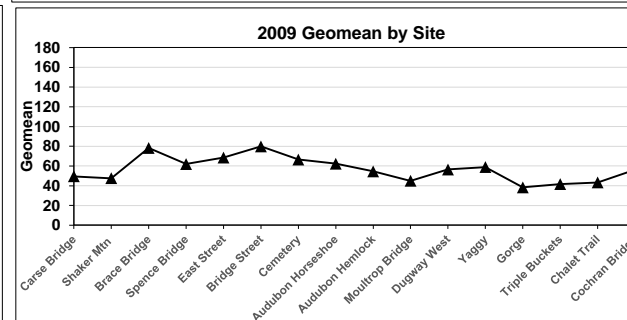
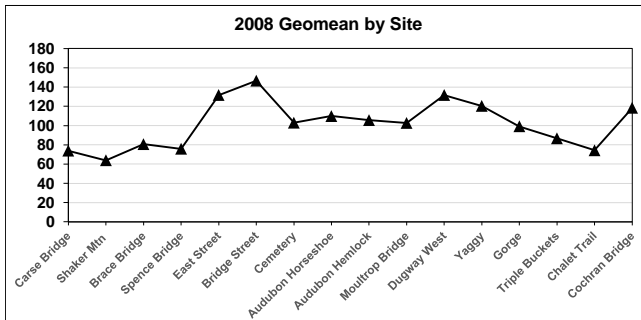
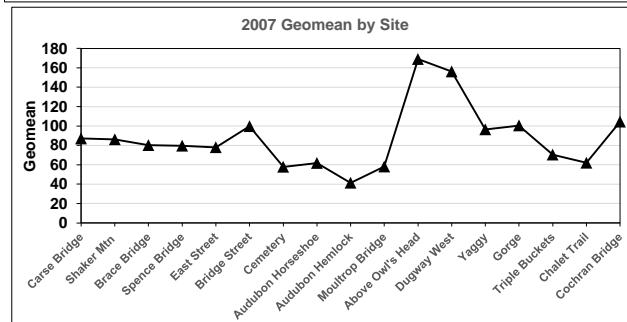
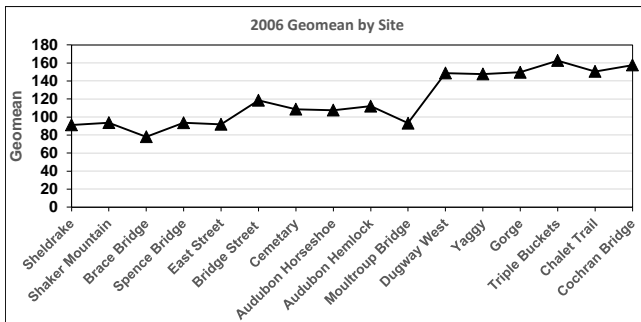
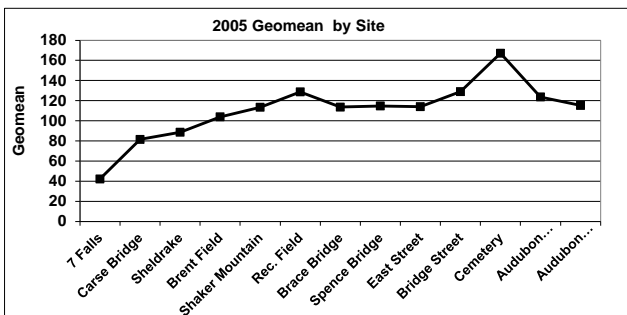
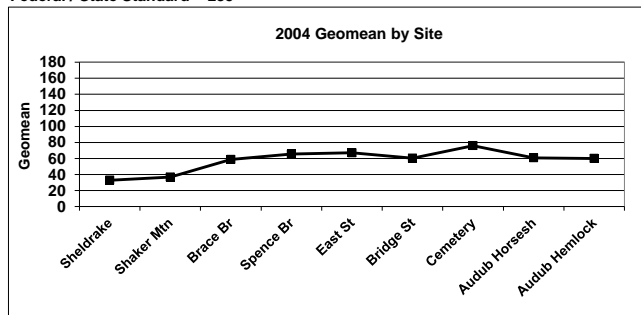
# Huntington River Study - 2015

Figure 3



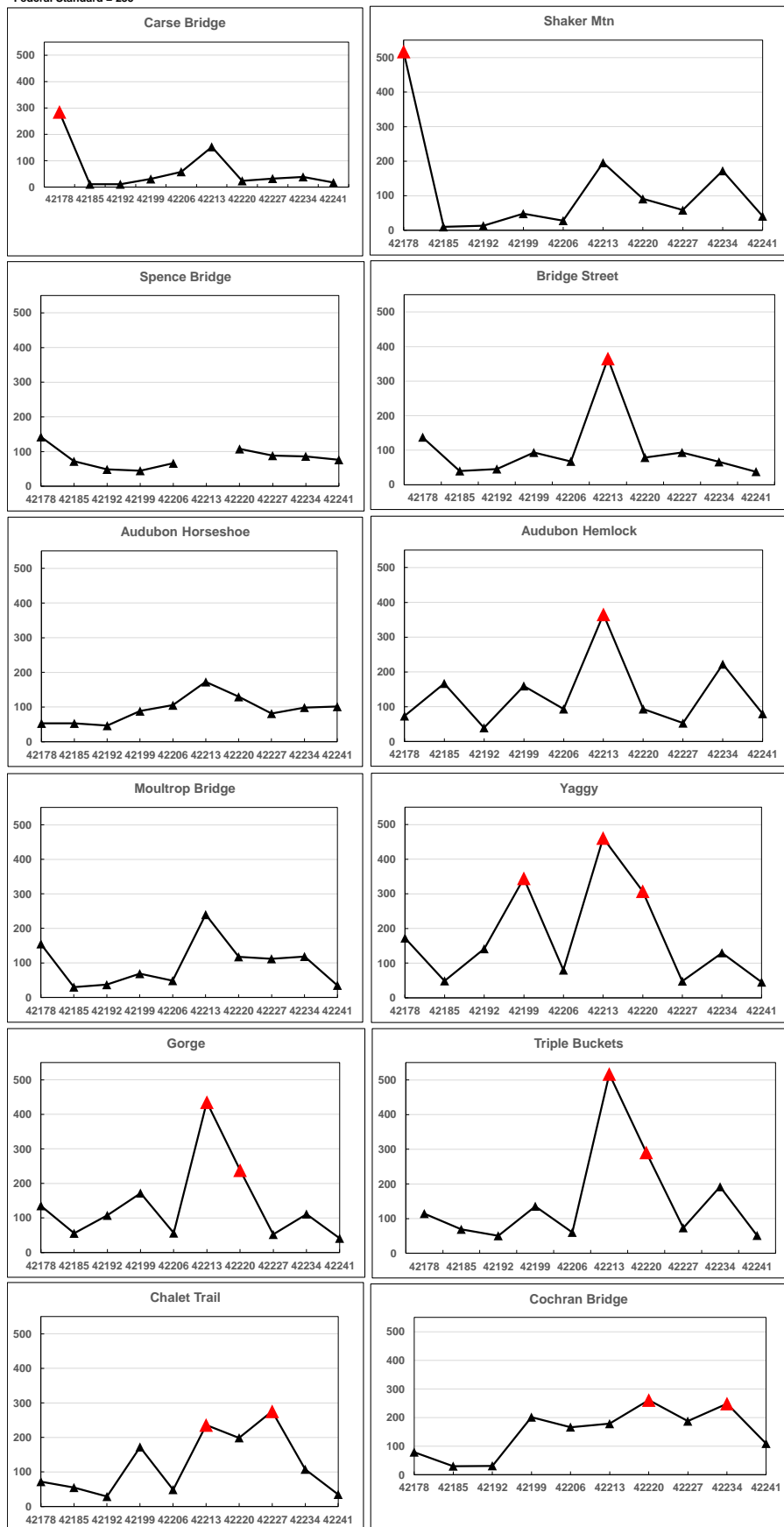


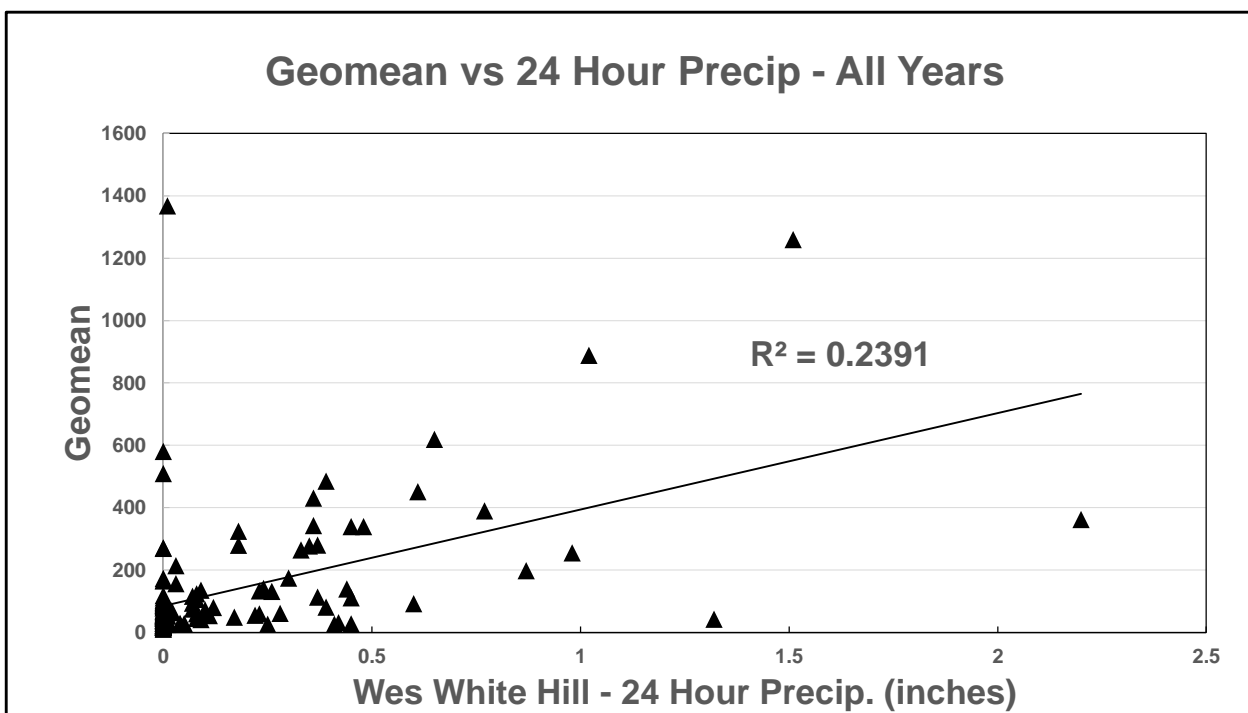
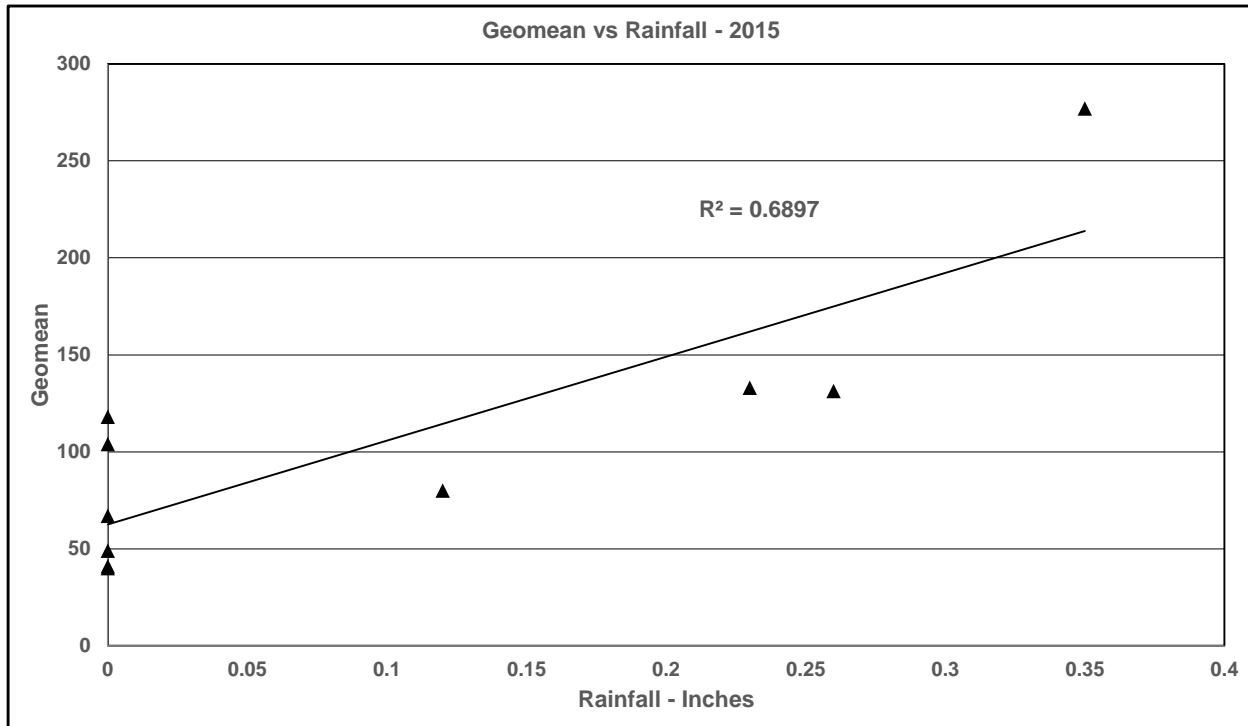


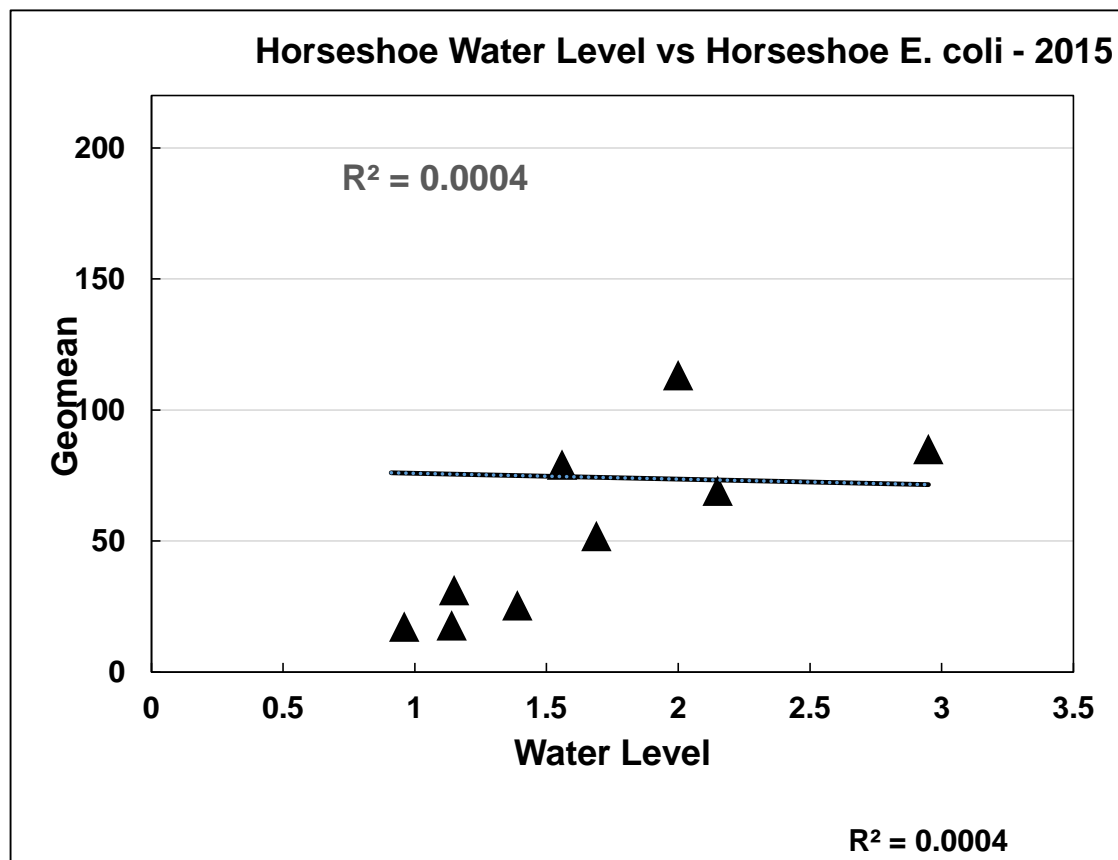
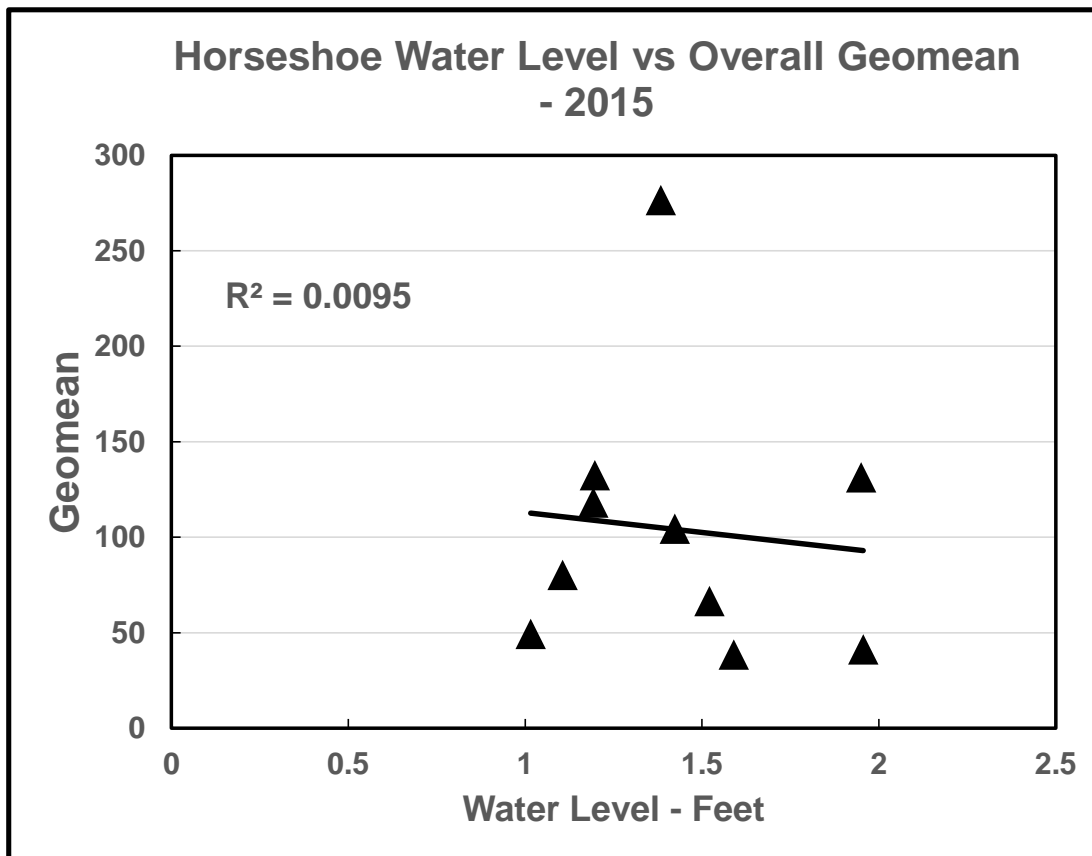


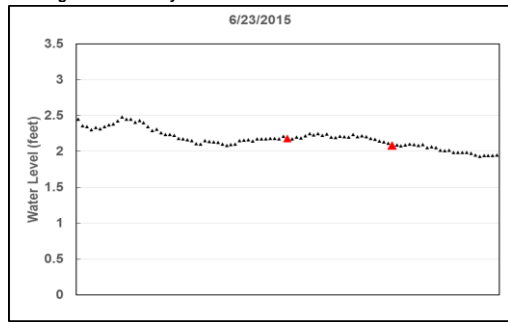
Huntington River Study - 2015  
Federal Standard = 235

Figure 5

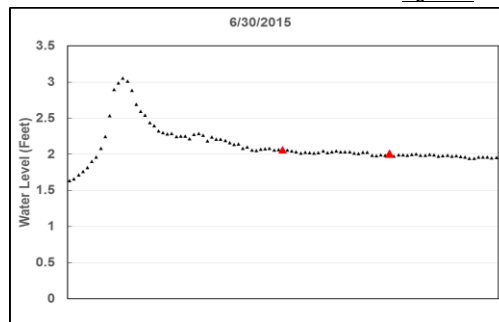




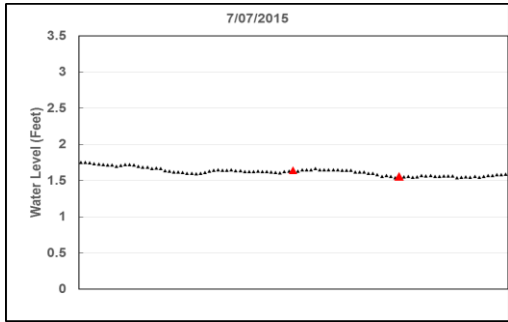




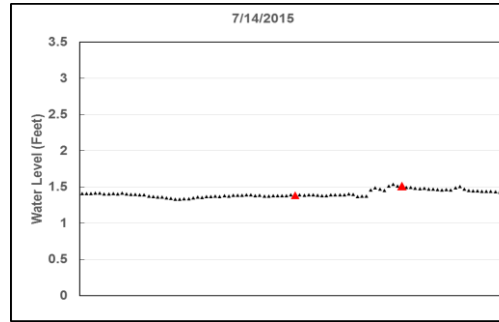
Geomean = 131.3



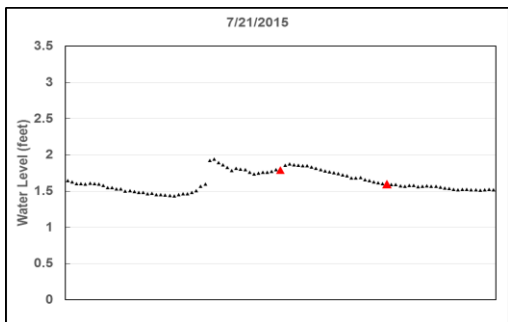
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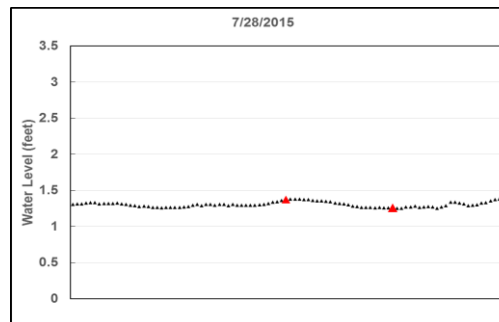
Geomean = 39.6



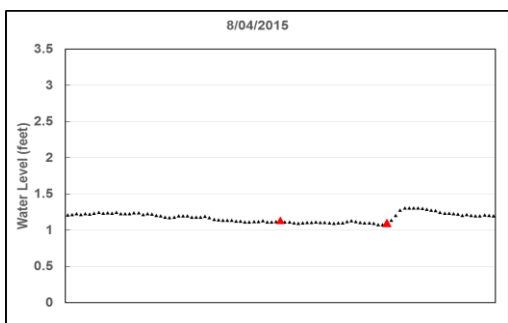
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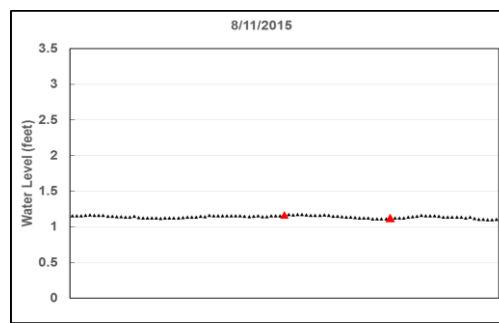
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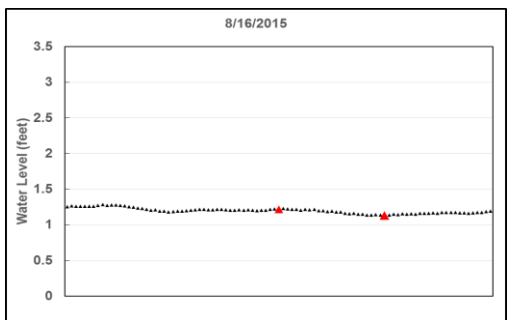
Geomean = 276.5



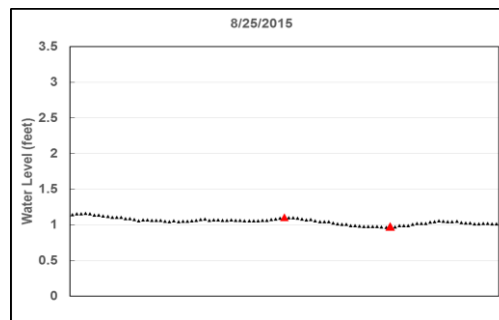
Geomean = 132.5



Geomean = 80.3



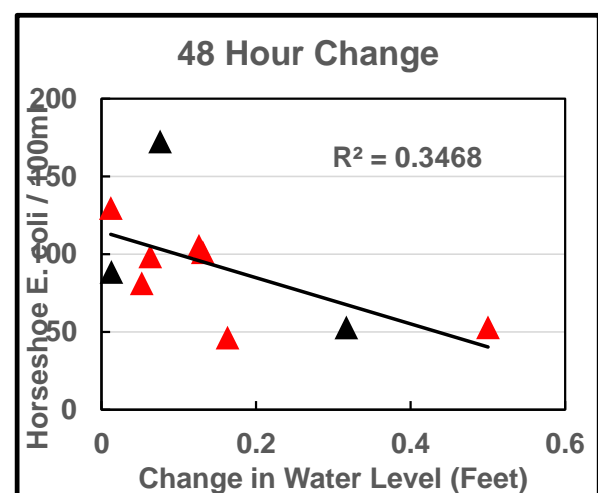
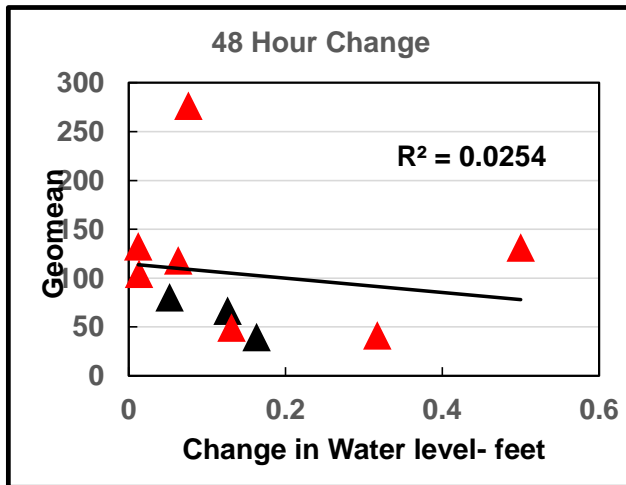
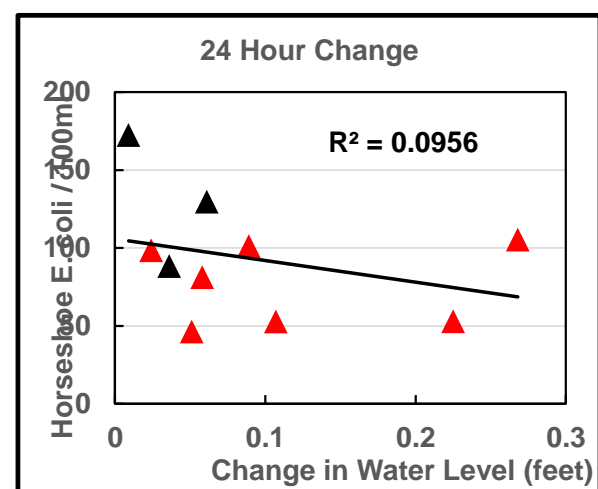
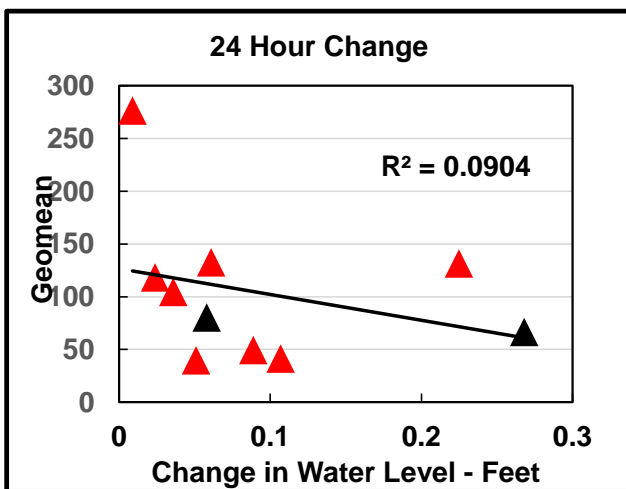
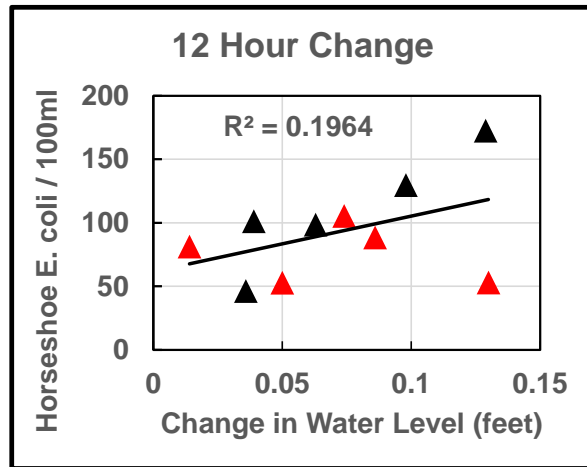
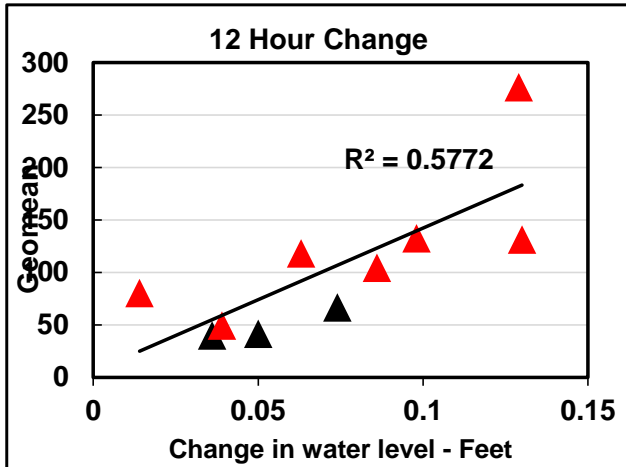
Geomean = 118.1



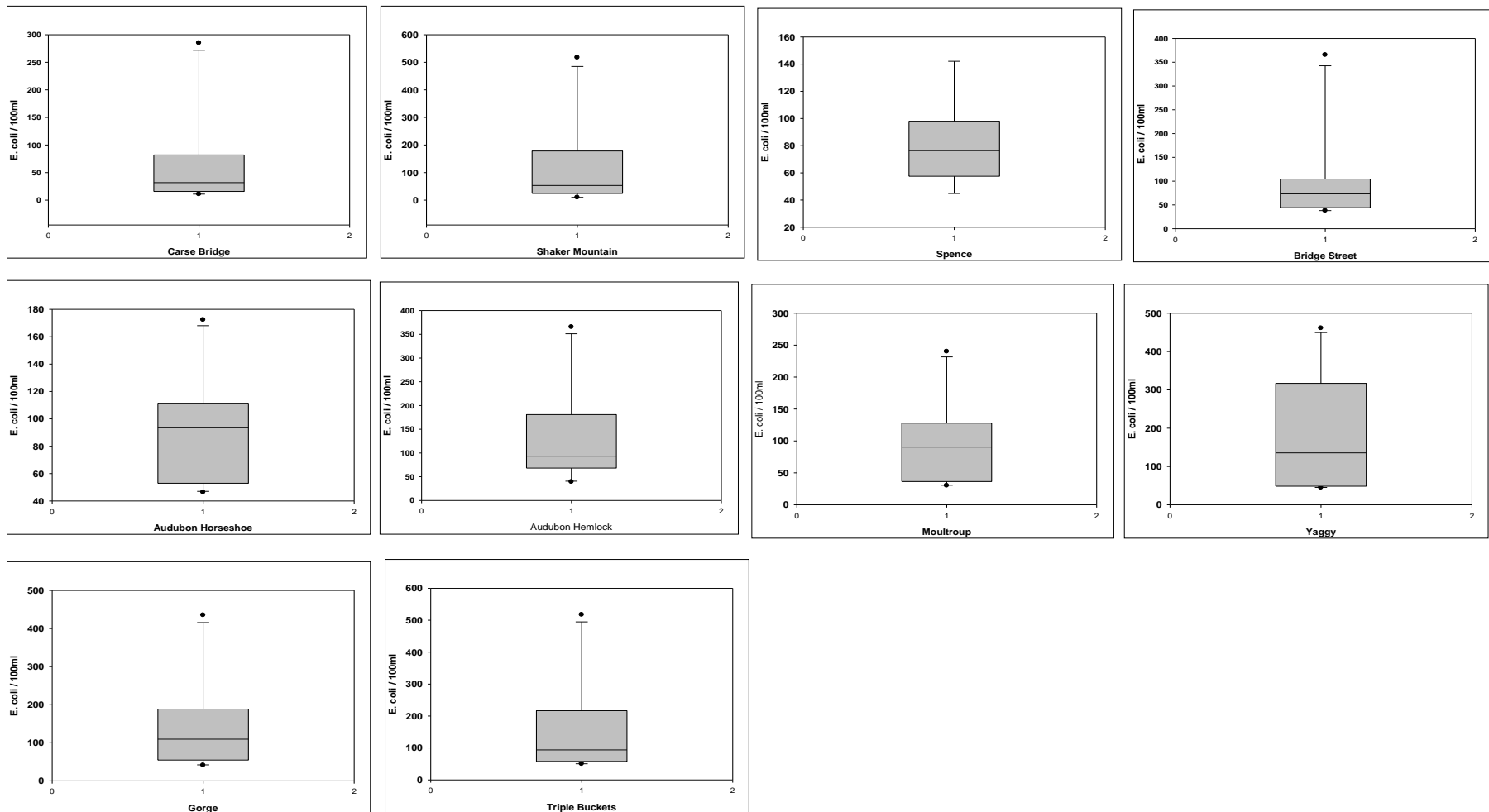
Geomean = 49.3

# Huntington River Study - 2015- Water Level Change

**Figure 6.4.1**







# HUNTINGTON RIVER Total Phosphorus RESULTS - 2015

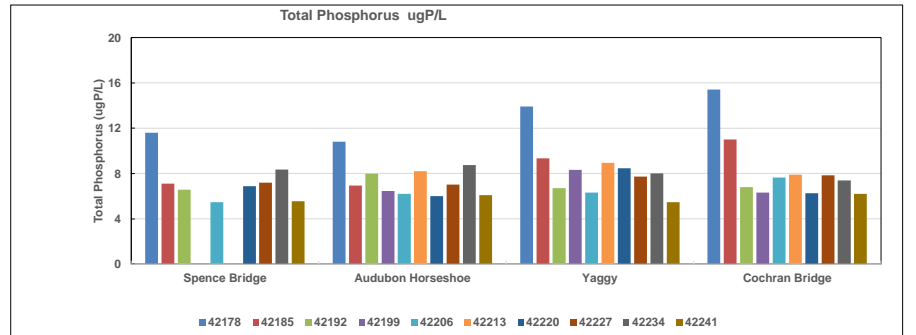
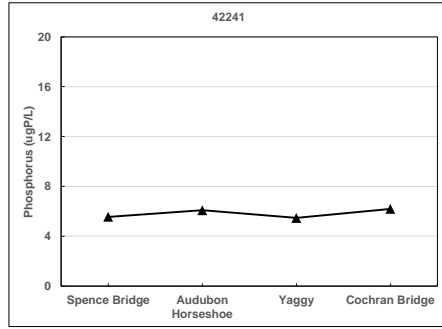
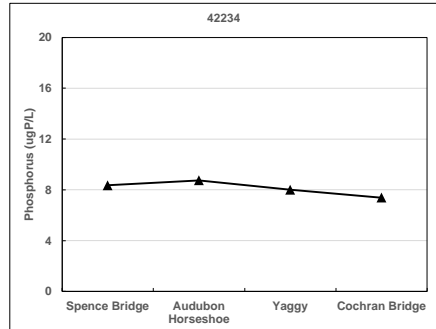
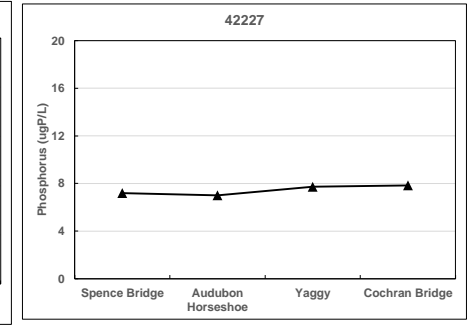
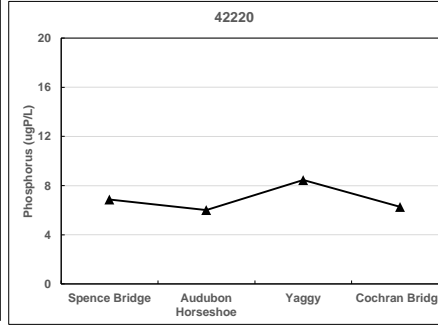
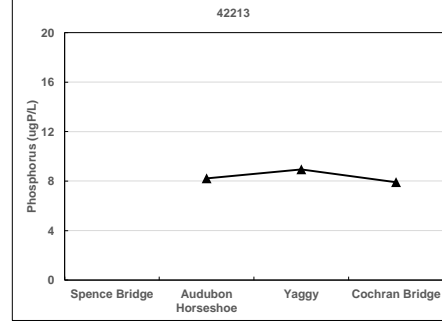
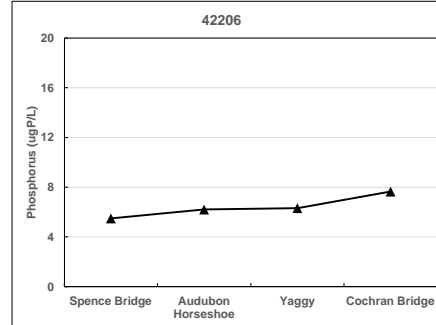
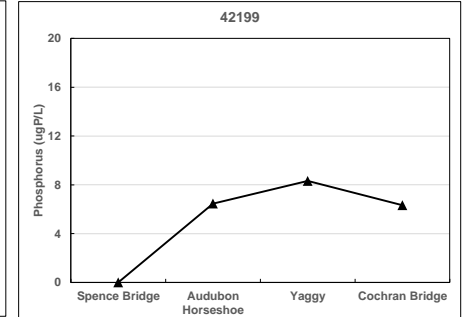
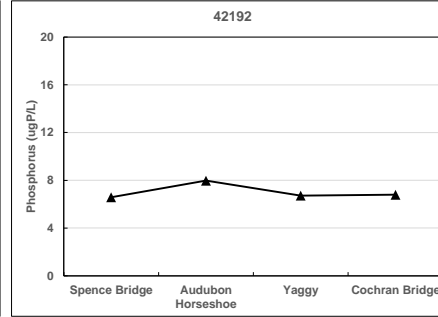
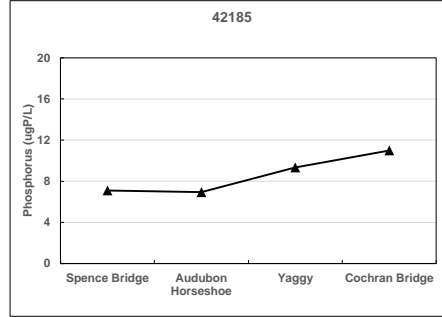
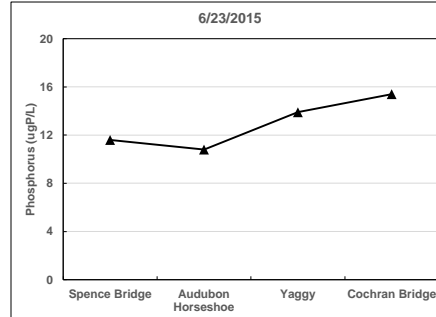


Figure 8

## WQ

## Table 1

Values are mpn / 100 ml	Above Federal level (235)	Huntington	71
	Above State Level (77)	Richmond	112

Huntington  
Richmond

112

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[illegible]

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Overall Results Composite - 2005-2014

Table 2

	6/22/2005	6/29/2005	7/6/2005	7/13/2005	7/20/2005	7/27/2005	8/3/2005	8/10/2005	8/17/2005	8/24/2005	8/31/2005	9/7/2005	9/14/2005	9/21/2005	9/28/2005	2005 GeoMean
Carson Bridge	226	43	46	295	45	86	162	42	668	41	84	244.8	37	9	18	18
Sanctuary	272	79	79	239	215	115	201	30	88	31	40	1200	34	34	34	19.9
East Street	272	79	79	239	215	115	201	30	88	31	40	1200	34	34	34	19.9
Sanctuary	481	66	278	89	69	167	878	40	80	63	1650	88	63	20	113.4	
Sanctuary	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123	123
Sanctuary	413	83	308	24	101	261	66	35	19	572	243.8	92	93	24	113.6	
Sanctuary	816	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
Sanctuary	488	66	1190	65	66	275	63	32	43	243.8	278	66	34	24	114.6	
Sanctuary	770	60	380	38	40	449	39	46	55	206	887	272	83	33	120.9	
Sanctuary	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387	387
Sanctuary	147	132	1200	62	137	369	71	37	45	579	192	88	30	37	192.7	
Sanctuary	131	68	1200	63	83	401	77	112	37	112	600	192	192	24	29	115.2
2006																
	20-Jun-06	27-Jun-06	5-Jul-06	11-Jul-06	18-Jul-06	25-Jul-06	1-Aug-06	8-Aug-06	14-Aug-06	22-Aug-06	29-Aug-06	5-Sep-06	12-Sep-06	19-Sep-06	2006 GeoMean	
Sanctuary	114	116	56	178	56	56	136	32	10	39	22	14	24	19	42.8	
Sanctuary	152	179	56	129	66	56	64	19	18	71	22	71	12	12	48.8	
Sanctuary	86	249	48	79	40	152	156	887	86	156	86	89	21	20	77.8	
Sanctuary	125	166	26	66	125	66	166	51	166	135	26	36	51	6	66.6	
Sanctuary	172	38	61	179	25	119	55	22	79	31	37	22	43	55.9		
Sanctuary	136	226	56	122	172	56	114	83	22	72	23	29	15	22	55.3	
Sanctuary	144	214	55	52	172	55	114	83	22	72	23	29	15	22	55.3	
Sanctuary	179	387	43	36	119	61	214	45	31	58	32	18	18	55.2		
Sanctuary	112	387	62	66	145	113	146	39	23	36	37	17	17	13	157.7	
Sanctuary	186	388	48	28	81	55	172	49	22	187	25	25	13	12	51.7	
Sanctuary	192	241	55	181	113	63	146	52	36	109	37	6	44	159.9		
Sanctuary	173	481	60	149	105	86	172	49	21	102	51	139	12	49	79.9	
Sanctuary	193	388	66	138	138	66	138	51	18	88	31	77	16	124	79.9	
Sanctuary	291	387	88	219	66	72	146	41	11	121	18	61	13	28	64.8	
Sanctuary	385	315	91	138	69	62	219	46	17	102	19	38	11	22	58.6	
Sanctuary	411	138	72	138	55	55	219	36	20	20	20	24	24	24	74.6	
Sanctuary	190	388	66	138	138	66	138	51	18	88	31	77	16	124	79.9	
Sanctuary	291	387	88	219	66	72	146	41	11	121	18	61	13	28	64.8	
Sanctuary	385	315	91	138	69	62	219	46	17	102	19	38	11	22	58.6	
Sanctuary	411	138	72	138	55	55	219	36	20	20	20	24	24	24	74.6	
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Sanctuary	190	388	66	138	138	66	138	51	18	88	31	77	16	124	79.9	

# Huntington River Study: Year-by-Year Comparisons\*

**Table 3**

	2004**	2005**	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015****
<b>Overall Geomean</b>	58	110	64	88	103	57	65	61	105	53	87
<b>Overall Geomean: Huntington</b>	58	110	59	75	99	63	65	60	106	48	71
<b>Overall Geomean: Richmond</b>	Not done	Not done	72	102	85	49	66	56	98	61	112
<b>Days when overall Geomean for the day &gt; Federal</b>	2	3	1	3	3	0	2	2	3	1	0
<b>Days when overall Geomean for the day &gt; State</b>	4	10	6	6	9	4	5	3***	4***	2	9
<b>Total samples &gt; Federal</b>	20	48	19	39	61	12	25	27	48	11	16
<b>Total samples &gt; State***</b>	40	98	58	94	137	58	79	37	75	35	47
<b>Overall Geomean for any site over season &gt; Federal</b>	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Overall Geomean for a site over season &gt; State***</b>	0	12	5	12	14	4	2	2	14	1	6

\*Winooski River samples not included

\*\*Huntington Segment only was studied

\*\*\* State Standard became Federal Standard in 2012. Indicated number based on old State Standard = 77, for purposes of comparison with previous years.

\*\*\*\*Two fewer sites

**2015 Huntington River E. coli Field Duplicates**
**Table 4**

Date	Location	Results		Relative Percent	Absolute Difference
		A	B		
6/23/2015	Carse	285.1	488.44	71.3	203.3
6/23/2015	Chalet	71.73	78.94	10.1	7.2
6/30/2015	Shaker	9.79	17.12	74.9	7.3
6/30/2015	Cochran Bridge	30.05	45.49	51.4	15.4
6/30/2015	Texas Hill	13.50	13.50	0.0	0.0
7/14/2015	Bridge Street	93.31	74.30	20.4	19.0
7/28/2015	Audubon Hemlock	365.40	344.80	5.6	20.6
8/11/2015	Moultroup Bridge	111.90	143.87	28.6	32.0
8/18/2015	Moultroup Bridge	118.74	114.46	3.6	4.3
8/25/2015	Bridge Street	37.86	78.50	107.3	40.6
8/25/2015	Yaggy	45.00	36.92	18.0	8.1
		<b>Mean</b>		<b>35.6</b>	